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Oral History Collections on the Holocaust in Hungary¹

*"It is time to step back and take an accounting:
Where does all this history and its telling lead,
to what kinds of knowledge, to what ends?
For this is, I believe the primary challenge to Holocaust art
and historiography in an anti-redemptory age: it is history-telling
and memory that not only mark their own coming into being
but also point to the places – both real and imagined –
they inevitable take us."*
James Young²

Abstract

This paper focuses on Hungary, where the most unmerciful and the fastest destruction took place in the course of the European Holocaust. Even though it was indeed 'the most unmerciful' and 'the fastest', Holocaust research still fails to take a prominent role in Hungarian historiography. The archival collections do not constitute an inherent part of the Hungarian national historical heritage. That is to say that the experiences of both the Holocaust and the Roma Genocide³ have not yet become part of collective knowledge; nor have they been able to shape collective identities.

This paper seeks to explore this ignorance through an analysis of existing digital oral history collections on the Holocaust in Hungary. The collections will appear in the order of their creation and will be discussed on the basis of questions such as who supported the collection and for what reason, how much research was done or what results they produced; we will also address whether the collections were established for museological, educational, scientific or tourism-stimulating purposes. The paper identifies three main reasons for the ignorance: First, it argues that – after the regime changes 1989/90 – while coming to terms with the memory of Nazism and autochthonous authoritarian regimes was one of the challenges of Eastern European societies, this process was competing with and retarded by the other challenge, namely the coming to terms with the communist system. Second, it states that the status of the research on the Holocaust and on the Roma Genocide is highly influenced by the actual social, cultural and political environment, while, third, we argue that one reason is the conservative attitude of European historiography.

1 This is a revised version of an article originally published in Hungarian: Kovács Éva, Lénárt András and Szász Anna Lujza, A Magyar Holokauszt személyes történetének digitális gyűjteményeiről [About the Digital Collections of the Hungarian Holocaust], in: BUKSZ – Budapesti Könyvszemle [Budapest Review of Books] 23 (2011).

2 James E. Young, At Memory's Edge. After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture. New Haven – London 2000, 11.

3 The archives under discussion tie our hands in how to name the historical period. If we were exclusively dealing with the persecution of the Jews then we would have to choose between the words Shoah or Holocaust, while a sole focus on Roma introduce even more phrases that are in use (Porrajmos, Pharrajimos, Kali Traš, Samudaripen). Since we are addressing the memories of the persecution of both groups, we decided to use the word Holocaust with reference to the Jewish persecutions and the word Genocide with reference to the Roma.

Although the experience of the Holocaust is paradigmatic for the history of events and ideas of the 20th century, its research in Hungary not only started late (namely in the beginning of the 1980s), but also was barely institutionalised. Thus, on the one hand, institutional identities and interests failed to offer structures and ways to promote collective memories and on the other, memory was hardly able to play a role in the process of the construction of collective identities. As far as universities are concerned, there has yet to be a department or program established that explores the Holocaust from a historical, sociological, anthropological or psychological perspective. Departments of Hebrew and Jewish Studies focus on the history of the Jews before the 20th century. For example, the program on the Holocaust run by the *Department of Assyriology and Hebrew* at the *Eötvös Lóránd University* in Budapest under the leadership of Géza Komoróczy in cooperation with his colleagues lasted only a few semesters.

Researchers in higher education approached the Holocaust and its consequences not only from a historical perspective but also by analysing the empirical data gained through psychological and psychiatric treatments. There are also a number of publishing houses, journals, websites and clubs with a special focus on Jewish studies. Furthermore, an official Memorial Day (April 16) was established for schools in 2000 and the *Holocaust Memorial Centre* was opened in 2005.⁴

This latter institution deserves more attention. At the end of the 1990s, the Hungarian political elite took the decision to establish two historical museums. This decision, which was deeply criticized by the media, was to set the tone for the public discourse on both the history of Hungary in the 20th century and its memory for a long time. The *Memorial Centre* does not 'exist' on its own; it is a *counterpart* to the House of Terror, which opened its doors in 2002 and was widely criticised for its factual mistakes, simplifying contents, its the black-and-white perception of history, disproportionate emphases, the influence of politics, and for the provocative choice of the site and the construction of the blade-wall. Furthermore, the Memorial Centre for the Holocaust, was situated on the outskirts of the city at a considerable distance from the location of the former Jewish ghetto; this essential lack of a geographical contextualisation for the building revealed the ways in which the Holocaust is approached by social and political powers in Hungary.

Yet, from a present-day perspective, it was an irrevocable mistake on the part of the dominant cultural policy of the time to separate the ongoing discussions of the two consecutive stormy epochs not only in the urban but also in the mental space: into a 'cold', i.e., inactive memory of Nazism and a 'hot', i.e., still mobilizing memory of Communism.⁵ Hence, the ordinary visitor to any one of these museums can decide whether a 'Jewish' or a 'Hungarian' narrative of suffering is of more interest to him or her. But while – following recent research results – the Memorial Centre aims to convey the message that the persecution of Jews was an inherent part and result of Hungarian history, the House of Terror attempts to fade out this history. With regard to technology and spectacle, these two museums are the most advanced of all Hungarian memorial institutions. In their state of separation, however, they establish an out-dated concept by creating two central but competing national sites of memory, i.e., national narratives.

⁴ We have already discussed the establishment of the museum in a wider context: Gerhard Seewann and Éva Kovács, *Juden und Holocaust in der ungarischen Erinnerungskultur*, in: *Südosteuropa* 54 (2006), 24–59.

⁵ Charles S. Maier, *Heißes und kaltes Gedächtnis. Über die politische Halbwertszeit von Nazismus und Kommunismus*, in: *Transit* 22 (2001/2002), 153–165.

Although personal recollections and family stories constitute a significant part of each exhibition, they invoke a sense of incompleteness since they are not aptly inserted into the narrative frame. As a result of the fact that these lives were reconstructed on the basis of archival sources, the survivors were not able to personally contribute their image and voice. Thus they become mere illustrations of a general narrative of political history. We therefore conclude that the marginalisation of the Holocaust as a research topic together with an essentially conservative historiographical approach that is based exclusively on archival sources are responsible for the fact that the voices of the eyewitnesses and survivors remain too quiet in the public history of the Holocaust in Hungary.⁶

That these two peculiar attitudes have gradually removed Hungary from participation in international research as well as the wider international public discourse is best indicated by the fact that the Holocaust in Hungary rarely features in international academic discussions (especially when compared to its significance). Historian Gábor Gyáni, who was commissioned to critically evaluate the Hungarian historiography of the Holocaust in 2008, argues that where there ought to be a river there is but a small stream of research conducted in Hungary. This research primarily focuses on the analysis of archival sources (mainly the existing archival documents of organisations and of governmental departments) and aims to reconstruct the history of events outside of any theoretical framework.⁷ However, as Gyáni adds, the broader international academic discourse nevertheless continues to follow schools of theory, arguing accordingly when it comes to the interpretation of universal and local phenomena of the Holocaust.

One among the many responses to the critical observations of Gyáni was László Karsai, Professor of History at the University of Szeged and the Head of the Yad Vashem Research Group⁸ in Hungary. In his extensive response, Karsai refined some issues of uncertainty, while at the same he did not clarify reassuringly why “the competent historian contributors of a representative companion to the historiography of the Holocaust”⁹ fail to refer to works of Hungarian authors, not even to those who publish in English.

The debate has closed and the situation has remained the same. Yet a minor change can be perceived: As Gyáni acknowledges in his permissive moments, we are seeing the emergence of a new generation of researchers, who are already familiar with contemporary theories.

6 Generally speaking, the oral history collections were only belatedly incorporated into Hungarian mainstream social history, see: András Lénárt, “Történetgyűjtés” – Oral history archívumok Magyarországon [Story Collecting – Oral History Archives in Hungary], in: *Aetas* 22 (2007), 5-30.

7 Balázs Ablonczy/Novák Attila, Tizenkét állítás a soáról [Twelve Statements about the Shoah], in: *Kommentár* 3 (2008), 9; Gábor Gyáni, Helyünk a holokauszt történetírásában [Our Place in Historiography], in: *Kommentár* 3 (2008), 13-23; László Karsai, A magyar holokauszt-történetírásról [About the Hungarian Holocaust-historiography], in: *Kommentár* 6 (2008): 91-104; Attila Pók, Krisztián Ungváry, Tamás Csiki and Kinga Frojimovics were also involved in the debate.

8 Unfortunately, the collection cannot be searched in Hungary, neither does Yad Vashem provide a database for further research. Researchers have to personally approach László Karsai and ask for access to the data.

9 Dan Stone (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust*. London 2004.

I. "Collecting oneself" – Interview Projects on the Holocaust and on Jewish Identity

Consequently, the collection of testimonies and interviews is not rooted in the mainstream of international Holocaust research in Hungary. A lack of historical projects focussing on testimonies has meant that the trauma of the past has remained with survivors and the descendants of victims. Hence, it is not by accident that it was psychologists who first were faced with the haunting heritage of the Holocaust, only later to inform the public about their findings (apart from a moderate amount of published autobiographical reflections and of their depictions in national and international fiction). According to Ferenc Erős, "[T]he scientific, visual and textual conceptualizations in some sense have become self-referent models. The cultural patterns were not sufficient to unfold individual life stories or autobiographical narratives. In fact, internal barriers and repressions had to be overcome to be able to communicate the experiences related to Jewishness. The situation was as followed: although there were many things available for the cultural memory, the communicative memory was suffering from deficits and shortages."¹⁰

A pioneer project on challenging forgetting and silence was conducted by Teréz Virág. She delivered a lecture on her therapeutic work with Holocaust survivors in front of a small audience (others claim there was a wider professional audience) on November 9, 1982. In the last remaining two decades of her life, she concentrated on understanding and analysing the trauma of the Holocaust. She published a call in one of the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association's newsletters that invited interested readers to talk about the (Jewish) past and to learn the history of others' descendants. That is to say that Virág initiated the first 'Holocaust discussion group', called KÚT, which was then a unique initiative in the Eastern bloc. It was turned into a psychotherapeutic consulting room in 1992 and later into a foundation.¹¹ Every year hundreds, by 1996 more than a thousand, socially traumatised persons approached the staff of the foundation. The primary focus was to heal the wounds of Holocaust survivors and their descendants, but the organisation also aimed to help victims of social persecution and of any other type of discrimination, organised conferences and summarised therapeutic observations in edited volumes.

Another psychotherapy project was initiated almost at the same time as Virág's undertaking: Ferenc Erős and András Stark were interested in how the first-generation descendants of Holocaust survivors coped with the anxiety stemming from their Jewishness or from its concealment. With the help of András Kovács and Katalin Lévai they started conducting interviews. The first essay, following the launch of the project for a professional audience, was published in the journal *Medvetánc* [Bear Dance] in 1985.¹² Further ambitious research projects were started and articles based on the approximately 150 in-depth interviews conducted a decade earlier by interviewers with various social backgrounds were published in

¹⁰ Ferenc Erős, 'A zsidó identitás 'felfedezése' Magyarországon a nyolcvanas években [The 'Discovery' of the Jewish Identity in Hungary in the Eighties]', in: Katalin Bárdos/Erős Ferenc/Kardos Péter (eds.), "... aki nyomot hagyott". In memoriam Virág Teréz [... who left a trace. In Memoriam Teréz Virág], Budapest 2003, 55.

¹¹ Needless to say, the Foundation was financially supported by foreign organisations: the Representation of Hungary to the European Union, Soros Foundation, Cooperating Netherlands Foundations for Central and Eastern Europe, the Hungarian office of JOINT. Teréz Virág (ed.), *Elhúzódo társadalmi trauma hatásának felismerése és gyógyítása* [The Recognition and Healing of the Effects of Chronic Social Traumas] Budapest 1997.

¹² Ferenc Erős/Kovács András/Lévai Katalin, 'Hogyan jöttem rá, hogy zsidó vagyok? [How Did I realise that I am a Jew?]', in: *Medvetánc* 2-3 (1985), 129-145.

the 1990s.¹³ The transcriptions are currently the property of Ferenc Erős and András Kovács. Negotiations on archiving and digitisation the material have started only recently with the Voices of the 20th Century Research Archive (Voices) as well as with the Open Society Archive (OSA).

Another interview project, this one related to psychoanalysis, was started even earlier: in 1986–87, and with the help of scholarships, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Social Scientific Board of the Soros Foundation supported a research project entitled “The effect of prolonged and vitally dangerous social discrimination on the psychic life of survivors’ children”. The head of the research team was Júlia Szilágyi, its members were the psychiatrists István Cserne and Katalin Pető, as well as psychoanalyst and writer György Szőke. According to the existing research reports, they managed to conduct forty interviews with first- and second-generation representatives of Holocaust survivors. The interviewees were approached by applying the method of snowball sampling. The participants were assured that they would stay anonymous and the transcripts of their interviews would be used for a few presentations and publications in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The interviews focussed on life stories and were further concerned with the interviewees’ relationship to their Jewishness, with their families and with illnesses in the family as well as with syndromes considered to be pathological. This collection of interviews is also expected to be adopted by the Voices and the OSA.

Soon after the Jewish foundation schools were established in 1991, Éva Kovács and Júlia Vajda embarked on exploring the Jewish identity among second and third generation Holocaust survivors by applying the technique of narrative life history interviews, which they conducted with two dozen families. In each case, they spoke with both the parents and the children: However, it took another decade, until 2002, for the book that sums up the main lines of research to be published.¹⁴ Social psychologists and sociologists welcomed not only the new method but also the innovative approach to the personal memories of the Holocaust; social historians acknowledged it only several years later. As the above examples show, these interviews were conducted for the purpose of researching and not for archiving. There were no plans to store and provide public access to the collections.

The opposite can be said about the very large-scale video-interview project launched by the Shoah Foundation in the 1990s. The collection has finally been made accessible and researchable in Hungary. It is notable that instead of being canonised as a source in historical research, and as a result of the devoted work of one of its host-institutions, the Zachor Foundation, its testimonies have been used as an important educational resource.

On the basis of the above, we can conclude that the use of interviews as sources for scientific research was insufficient in the last thirty years. This is partly due to the fact that they are unknown and difficult to access as well as still barely analysed. In a wider sense, the negligence of qualitative sources is an unfortunate outcome of the efforts to come to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*). Thus, the search for identity and a self-definition in the 1980s and 1990s was followed by confrontations not only with the society’s disinterest and antipathy but also with relativisation and a conservative historiography. However, it has to be added that the interview

¹³ The research projects were funded as a result of the lobbying activity of professor György Csepeli, by the Faculty of Sociology at ELTE, then the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund and the Randolph Braham Foundation.

¹⁴ Éva Kovács/Vajda Júlia, *Mutatkozás. Zsidó Identitás Történetek* [Appearance. Jewish Identity Stories]. Budapest 2002.

situation was considered to be therapeutic, since it held in itself the possibility to re-experience past events and at the same time express and invoke one's Jewishness in the present through the act of speech; in other words, through the narration of the self. Narration construed permanence in time and organised the past of the person who through the capacity of speech and gestures performed his/her Jewishness. Additionally, these interviews had a social function among second-generation Jews by contributing to the Jewish revival. Hence, becoming visible and providing autobiographical accounts of the past encouraged the younger generation of Jews to reconstruct their identity from the perspective of being a Jew.

II. Counter-memories – the Lonely Governmental Initiative for Documenting Nazism and Communism

Soon after the regime change, victims of all kinds of former totalitarian and authoritarian Hungarian regimes went public with their stories in order to reclaim their lives and identities as well as to establish their truth about past events. However, this boom of remembering calmed down after a few years and took a more or less political turn. There occurred a politicisation of memories, that is to say, a fierce struggle over language and visibility in which memory was able to legitimise present political aims and at the same time could preserve itself for future remembering.

One of the most apparent manifestations of political influence in shaping memories is the Hungarian government's wish to assign all tasks for producing, collecting and recording personal memories of the post-1945 period to The Public Foundation for the Research of Central and East European History and Society, which operates the House of Terror, in order to develop inter-generational knowledge-sharing and to channel the material into education. Evidently, the Hungarian scientific communities have grown accustomed to the fact that politics is only moderately sensitive to professional argumentation. When questions of expenses in the cultural and scientific sphere are decided on the grounds of prestige rather than professional considerations, this is usually followed by an outcry from the given field's (intellectual) professionals. Such an outcry did occur in this case as well, but remained in vain.

The Public Foundation, under the auspices of Mária Schmidt, was commissioned and took up operations in 2009. It is a large-scale research project with absolute priority for the government, mainly supported by the European Union. Although the budget of the Public Foundation would have sufficed in order to preserve and improve the conditions in many of the already existing audio/visual interview archives as well as to make them accessible and channel them into education, the foundation established a new visual archive titled *Emlékpontok* [Memory-spots]. We can assume that the decision-makers were not aware of the interview collections owned by civil organizations or individuals. If they did, however, know of their existence, they obviously saw less political profit to be gained in these than in a grand 'national' plan. Evidently, such an allocation of EU-funds as well as the juxtaposition of the memory of Communism with the experience of Hungarian Jews raised thought-provoking questions. After all, it was a decision not only of the distribution of funds but also of the politics of history.

A memory, hand in hand with the socially constructed 'spirit' of the archive, that is 'invented' and worth preserving is able to trigger an avalanche of endless power manipulations. This is the true implication of the gigantic scale of the *Emlékpontok* collection ('only' 3,200 out of the planned tens of thousands of interviews were actually

conducted and only 1658 are available on the website. The amount is remarkable *per se*, as will be demonstrated later on in the discussion on the existing archives.). Generally speaking, the institution of an archive, which represents and provides access to a collection, is necessarily involved in the process of canonisation: it influences the discursive formation and maintenance of identity, in this case national identity.¹⁵ Thus, the institutionalization of the past which is organised around questions such as ‘What to collect?’, ‘How to collect?’, ‘What to do with the collection?’, or ‘What to remember and what to forget?’ is one of the many techniques which construct a community in the social space that is managed by politics. In this sense, the archive is a ‘saturated space’, which uses the past in order to shape collective identifications. However, another reading of the archive as an institution suggests that the preservation of memories is merely a compulsive habit. It is understood as a contemporary phenomenon which aims to disguise the instability of the ‘self’ as a result of the technological development and of the late modern age as well as to provide a shelter from social changes; it re-evokes the past in the present but fails to relate it to future expectations.¹⁶

III. Private obsessions – Interview Collections on the Roma Genocide

The majority of primary source materials related to the Roma Genocide are in private hands. Both their status of obscurity and their rather bad quality (a consequence of how they have been stored) preclude direct access, knowledge production and knowledge sharing as well as the publication of results. As if the Roma Genocide itself was Pandora’s box, as if the narrators of past events were the carriers of secrets which would better be forgotten: “[a]t one and the same time the Gypsies conspire to forget the trauma of their persecution and to hold on – though in silence – to a hidden, collective memory of it”. However, in this case, the root of the problem is not the forgetting, as remembering and forgetting are not mutually exclusive practices. “The opposing concepts are preservation and erasure.”¹⁷ In a slight exaggeration, this paper argues that both terms proved to be harmful to the research on the Roma Genocide: with regard to preservation, there are ‘private obsessions’ and with regard to erasure, there is a real or simulated lack of concern evolving in the prevailing political field of power. Hence, the real tragedy of the Roma Genocide is that it is still considered alien within the corpus of Holocaust historiography and of national history. Furthermore, it is neither incorporated in the collective memory of Roma nor does it play any significant role in the process of identification at individual, group and community levels.

There are gaps in our knowledge of the Roma Genocide. The question of ‘*What happened?*’ remains unanswered – partly due to the lack of documents, partly because there was no central order issued for the persecution of Roma by the authorities in 1944. As a result, some researchers argue that the Roma Genocide cannot be qualified as part of the Holocaust since, unlike in the case of the *Endlösung* there was no deliberate intention to annihilate.¹⁸ Each district or county were autonomous in

¹⁵ György Péter/iss Barbara/Monok István (eds.), *Kulturális örökség – társadalmi képzelet* [Cultural Heritage – Social Imagination]. Budapest 2005), 7-8.

¹⁶ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts. Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford 2003.

¹⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *Az emlékezet hasznáról és káráról* [On the Use and Abuse of Memory]. Budapest 1998 13 [The original version of this text is titled ‘Les abus de la mémoire’ and presented at a conference organized by the Auschwitz Foundation in Brussels in 1992].

¹⁸ E.g.: Guenter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies*. Oxford 2001.

treating their Roma population; the documents are scattered in local archives. Finding them, organising them on the basis of various themes and analysing them would require determination, cooperation, and an enormous amount of financial and human capital. Moreover, the recorded testimonies – although they were not destined for filling the gaps in the documentation of the past – failed to become part of a collective knowledge.

Zsuzsanna Vidra wrote an essay in which she summarises those political and historiographical discourses that play a significant role in shaping the narrative of the persecution.¹⁹ She discusses international developments such as that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was founded exclusively upon Jewish experiences or that the representation of Roma was gaining gradually more space as a result of the work of Ian Hancock and Sir Angus Fraser. Vidra also explores the international debate between the Roma Genocide researchers at the British Hertfordshire University and the Gypsy Lore Society, which deeply influenced the Hungarian historiographical approaches.²⁰ While the former claim that Roma were persecuted on racial grounds and that the repercussions of this genocide still structure the underlying distributive and redistributive mechanisms of the society, the latter organisation considers the Holocaust as a defining “Jewish event”. None of the parties is able to free itself from that political and moral framework.²¹

IV. Personal Narratives of the Holocaust

IV. 1. Collections of the Holocaust Memorial Centre

A collection of memoirs, articles and objects came into being through the dedicated work of both the Hungarian Resistance Fighters’ and Antifascists’ Alliance (*Magyar Ellenállók és Antifasiszták Szövetsége*, MEASZ, established in 1945) and the Committee for the Victims of Nazi Persecution (*Nácizmus Üldözötteinek Országos Egyesülete*, NÜB, established in 1971), and was completed by the compilation of the Auschwitz Foundation. This collection was then merged with the Holocaust Memorial Centre, established in 2004, but in separated form. In the last decade, the activities of the Centre have been overshadowed by professional and political debates and scandals covered by the media. The archiving of documents was considered less important than other priorities set in the fields of education, research and exhibition, hence professional preservation did not begin before the summer of 2010.

The Centre’s holdings are divided into five main sub-collections: documents, testimonies, photographs, audio-visuals and objects. In the autumn of 2011, 9,000 items were registered in the inventory, 673 of which were testimonies. A scan of the registry files reveals that the testimonies and diaries arrived in two waves in the 1960s and 1980s when the survivors handed them over to the MEASZ (in the course of compensation proceedings). Until today, the Centre is continuing to receive these kinds of sources. In most cases, the texts are short and factual, in accordance with the written requests for compensation. They focus on the experiences of forced labour and of the concentration camps, providing summaries of the individuals’ sufferings on a few pages each. Strangely, the archive of the Centre lacks collections of interviews

¹⁹ Zsuzsanna Vidra, A roma holokaust narratívái. Történetírás, megemlékezés, politikai diskurzusok [Narratives of the Roma Holocaust. Historiography, Commemoration, Political Discourses], in: *Regio 2* (2005), 111-129.

²⁰ Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe’s Gypsies*. New York 1972.

²¹ Daniel Lévy/Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*. Philadelphia 2006.

conducted for the purpose of research. This is particularly interesting in light of the Centre's mission statement, wherein the institution considers itself the only establishment with the aim of exclusively collecting the sources, the memories of the persecutions. The lack of qualitative sources stems primarily from the fact that the Centre does not regard it as its duty to interview survivors and eye-witnesses. In other words, a greater emphasis was placed on the exploration of written and material sources than on the audio-visual recording of personal memories.

In 2001, Miklós Bauer, a former high-ranking officer at the communist State Protection Authority ÁVH, wrote his wartime memories at the age of 80 and donated one copy to the Memorial Centre. In his text entitled *De arte Vivendi*, he recalls his underground communist activity, which focused mainly on his involvement in falsifying documents. But apart from the above, the majority of the autobiographical accounts are produced by unknown or forgotten people. The audio-visual collection comprises various recordings stored on different, occasionally unplayable, types of data storage devices. There are films or recordings of public commemorations or audio interviews as well as interviews conducted by the Shoah Foundation in Hungary, which were handed over to the Centre personally by survivors. Furthermore, there are approximately thirty testimonies of particular relevance to Hungary, which were donated by the Shoah Foundation itself. Since 2005, donations can be accepted in a legally safety: the agreement ensures that the donor fully or partially cedes his/her right over the donation.

Regrettably, the main shortcoming of the collection is its lack of public visibility and its unmanaged state, despite the fact that it is located in a prestigious, state-funded institution with an extensive network of international partners. However, archival processing is making headway; it is only a question of time that the inventory will become an online, open-access research database.

The material on the Roma Holocaust ought also to be stored by the Memorial Centre. By this, we mean on the one hand the research conducted for the temporary Holocaust exhibition at the inaugural of the Holocaust Memorial Centre in 2004, and on the other hand the research that has been done for the permanent exhibition. The Bársony-Daróczis and the staff at the Roma Press Centre have lobbied assiduously in order to achieve the inclusion of the memory of the Roma Genocide. *Memory of the Pharrajimos* was arranged on the balcony of the synagogue and curated by Gábor Székely and Éva Orsós from the Museum of Ethnography. The institute appointed Péter Szuhay as curator who was in charge of the exhibition in close cooperation with Gábor Bernáth (then director of the Roma Press Centre) and together with his colleagues Andrea Tóth and János Bársony and the stage designer Márton Szuhay. Until November 2005, the display introduced a dozen testimonies recorded by János Bársony, Ágnes Daróczy, József Lojkó Lakatos, Ágota Varga as well as related photos. A book edited by János Bársony and Ágnes Daróczy (*Pharrajimos, The Fate of Roma during the Holocaust*²²) accompanied the exhibition. It was compiled with the help of even more interviews, studies and other notes than the collection actually presented: The archiving of the interviews has not yet begun.

Following the temporary exhibition, preparations were made to set up a permanent exhibit under the direction of head curator Judit Molnár. Judit Molnár and László Karsai took the decision to include the story of a Roma family next to the four stories of Jewish families from different social strata. In the autumn of 2004, a small re-

²² János Bársony/Ágnes Daróczy.(eds.) *Pharrajimos The Fate of Roma During the Holocaust*. New York, Budapest 2008.

search team was formed under the leadership of Péter Szuhay in order to find a Roma family who could be documented and visually presented. Based on their previously obtained knowledge, each researcher picked at least two communities and conducted around three unstructured interviews in each settlement in order to unfold the history of the family. The interviewers explored not only the experience of the Roma Genocide but also the history of the family and of the wider community. They also made findings on the relationship between the majority and the minority or the status of Roma on the labour market. The researchers also gave a voice to local historians and teachers by using their texts. The collection comprised photographs, birth certificates, identification cards, official documents, correspondence as well as in-depth interviews conducted on the settlement as part of the representative Roma survey in 1971.²³

Finally, written personal reports examined and summarised the findings and the experiences gained during each field investigation. Unfortunately, we have not succeeded in detecting this historical collection. According to the former head of research, the documents were handed over to the Hungarian National Museum, which was involved in setting up the exhibition. However, the museum's archives only hold the documentation of the collection, not the collection itself. The digital copies, however, have been preserved by Péter Szuhay in Budapest's Museum of Ethnography and are accessible following a prior agreement – yet there is justified concern regarding the proper preservation and management of the documents.

IV. 2. Esther's Bag Collection

The Esther's Bag Workshop is related to the special women's issue of the Jewish political and cultural magazine *Szombat (Shabbat)*. The special issue and the questions and topics it raised resonated on a collective level. This led to further discussions and finally Esther's Bag came into existence in 2002. Its founders are Borbála Juhász (historian), Andrea Kuti (then English language teacher, now rabbi), Katalin Pécsi (literary historian), Andrea Pető (historian), Mónika Sándor (psychologist), Zsuzsanna Toronyi (museumologist, now the Head of the Hungarian Jewish Archives) and Judit Wirth (women and children's advocate). The mission of the workshop was to "spread Jewish and female values" to a wider public and professional circles, reinterpreting traditional Jewish values from the perspectives of social justice, solidarity, and equal opportunities.

The most important pillar of its scope of activities – next to publications and the organisation of film clubs and conferences – is to collect personal testimonies of women on subjects that have been silenced and tabooed. Events like *Untold Stories by Jewish Women* were transmitted by word-of-mouth and set a stage where fear dissolved and even those who had not been able to speak before were able to gain a voice. The stories could be heard at readers' nights, and were eventually edited and published by Katalin Pécsi. The workshop continued to take place under the auspices of the Esther's House Association, which Pécsi established in 2007 with a focus on researching and photo-documenting the homes and material culture of Jewish women. In the meantime, Esther's Bag has joined the *Madok* programme of the Museum of Ethnography, which aims to establish a virtual museum for objects, which were made, used and cared for by women.

²³ Kemény, István/Rupp, Kálmán/Csalog, Zsolt/Havas, Gábor, Beszámoló a magyarországi cigányok helyzetével foglalkozó 1971-ben végzett kutatásról [Report on research carried out in 1971 on the situation of Gypsies in Hungary]. Budapest: Sociological Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS), 1976.

Most of the texts can be found on the archive pages of the *Szombat website*. It is unclear what is going to happen to the collection or who is going to take care of it if the workshops stop or the website goes offline.

IV. 3. *Centropa Collection*

The *Centropa Hungary Jewish Family History Non-profit Ltd. (Centropa)* officially launched its operations in Budapest in 2003. However, it had already started collecting materials (life stories, photographs, artefacts or their copies) three years earlier. Its international umbrella organisation (*Centropa – Central Europe Center for Research and Documentation*) had recorded life history interviews and collected photographs in fifteen countries within the framework of a project entitled *Stories from a Family Album – Memories of Hungarian Jews from the 20th Century*. The interviewers approached a precisely defined group of individuals, namely the generation born between 1910 and 1935, and asked them to describe the world they grew up in in the first half of the 20th century, then their life under the Holocaust and subsequently experiences after the war to the present. The primary goal was to document the every-day life of Jewish families with a special focus on photographs. The project regarded the photographs not only as documents of historical value but also as tools to recall the past. The explanations attached to the photographs and the stories unfolding from them complete visual memories well, yet they are significant enough in themselves to be recorded.

The founder of *Centropa* is the Austrian-American photographer, documentary film-maker and journalist Edward Serotta. By the end of the 1980s, he had managed to build his personal archive of photographs collected from Jews of Eastern European origin. He was also devoted to taking photographs and recording interviews. After a long preparation period, the *Central Europe Center for Research and Documentation* was registered as a non-profit NGO in the USA in the mid-1990s, with its headquarters located in Vienna, Austria and an additional office in Budapest, Hungary.

Both the interview format and the methodological guidelines were prepared by the sociologists Eszter Andor and Dóra Sárdi, who were also responsible for the coordination of interviewers, editors, historians etc., working for the project in other countries.²⁴ Initially, the organisation received a substantial amount of financial support from the Austrian federal government and from American Jewish foundations. As the funds were cut over time, *Centropa* stopped conducting interviews and shifted towards the preparation of educational materials. The commissioned interviewer had to make the appointment, fill out the (long enough) questionnaire, draw up the family tree, collect photographs and record the interview as well as adopt some small changes and produce a 20 or 30-page 'reader-friendly' edition of the transcript.

An earlier version of the website showed additional explanations to concepts and words; the current version makes neither these nor the methodological guidelines available. One of the biggest advantages of the present surface is that one can search in the database and explore the texts and images by categories such as state, individual, occupation, place, activity, document, Holocaust or military rank. It aims to reach a wider public. Hence the online platform is not concerned with the 'raw' texts and sounds. These are, however, available to researchers upon request. Images ap-

²⁴ Besides Austria and Hungary, the interviews were conducted in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Israel, Poland, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Turkey.

pear to be preferred to texts on the platform; no decision has yet been made regarding the preservation of audio-materials. However, the Hungarian regional coordinators claim that the digitisation of the recordings is on the agenda. The digitised images in lesser quality may only be used with the permission of the archive.

The website provides access not only to photographs, but also to eleven short films. The films focus on a single part of the life story, with the aid of moving and mounting the interviews, the photo database and other photos as well as inserting some sections of video recordings. Certain effects are increased by acting out interview texts, providing background music and audio description. It is up to the viewer to decide whether this increased aestheticisation of the Holocaust (the mass production of schematic short films) is appropriate to transmitting past experiences and will make future generations sensitive towards history or family stories.

On the Hungarian website, one can browse among 220 edited interviews and approx. 5,000 digitized photographs.²⁵ The structure elaborated by the founder and his advisors intends to achieve the highest grade of documentation and presentation of a group's past and present. Strikingly enough, there are only two contact people listed on the website and not much information provided on the activities of the foundation, particularly recent ones.²⁶ Students have the opportunity to upload photographs and videos, but only a small number of children and adolescents have taken the opportunity to do so. Those few photos illustrate everyday life at Jewish schools, occasionally including festivities. It seems that *Centropa* is no longer a favoured or financially supported Holocaust archive. The only ongoing programme is the *Café Centropa*, which is formed by former interviewees who meet every six weeks at the Bálint House, a Jewish community centre in Budapest.

IV. 4. The Mauthausen Survivors Documentation Project (MSDP) and the Forced Labour 1939–1945 Collection

In 2002, the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior initiated an international project for the worldwide recording of testimonies given by survivors of the Mauthausen concentration camp and its satellite camps. The Hungarian team recorded 52 audio and five video interviews in Hungarian, using the narrative technique.²⁷ One copy of each interview, of the collected artefacts as well as of their additional documentation came to Hungary in the autumn of 2011. Since 2012, the material has been accessible through an online platform jointly maintained by the Voices of the 20th Century Archive and Research Group: One third of the interviews have already been transcribed.

The German Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future (EVZ – Stiftung Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft) was established in 2000. As the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II was approaching, the EVZ intended to give voice to those individuals who were deployed as forced labourers or slave workers in the Third Reich between 1939 and 1945.²⁸ The Hungarian team, led by Éva Kovács, conducted fifteen interviews in Hungary and four interviews in Slovakia, all of them in Hungarian. Voices of the 20th Century Archive and Research Group finally got the

25 Photographs and interviews were collected between 2000 and 2008.

26 There is no information available on the exhibition, which introduced the oeuvre of photographer Imre Kinszki, in cooperation with the Jewish Museum.

27 <http://www.mauthausen-memorial.at/>, last accessed July 12, 2013.

28 "EVZ Stiftung," accessed July 12, 2013, <http://www.stiftung-evz.de/eng/the-foundation/history.html>, <http://www.zwangsarbeit-archiv.de/en/index.html>.

copyright for these interviews in order to promote further research on the material in Hungary. In 2010/11, the Hungarian sub-collection was prepared for high school and university education with funding by the Active Remembrance' Programme of the European Commission's Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). The material focuses on the aspects of liberation and homecoming.²⁹

IV. 5. The "Totalitarianism and Holocaust" Collection

This archive was state funded with a smaller investment than the above-mentioned *Emlékpontok* Visual Archive. It was run as a sub-project in the framework of the Spirit of Europe and the Totalitarianism projects, directed by Júlia Vajda. The project was set up in order to explore the memory of the Holocaust by analysing testimonies given by survivors and eyewitnesses of the first half of the 20th century. It aimed to understand the history of a mentality and the historical context that led to the mass destruction of life. In the course of the project, which started in 2004, the team recorded 334 narrative life history interviews. The research director stated that they encountered particular difficulties in approaching eyewitnesses. In contrast to the experience of freedom in survivor testimonies, eyewitness accounts are overshadowed by a sense of shame stemming from the narrators' past failure to act.

Each interview is accompanied by a questionnaire that sums up the most important data on the interviewees' experiences of persecution and war. The interviewers also took every opportunity to collect artefacts, photographs or other documents. The collection is stored at the University of Debrecen and at the OSA. Interviews kept at the latter are only accessible with permission from the interviewees. A copy of the collection was delivered to the *Yad Vashem Museum* in the spring of 2010.

It is uncertain whether there will be sufficient funds available in the future in order to preserve the interviews and make them openly accessible (only twenty out of 334 have so far been transcribed). Other issues concern target groups and future potential researchers. If OSA begins to archive these documents, it will aspire to ensure open access as well as improved search and user functionality in accordance with its mission statement: „to broaden access to primary sources by overcoming technical, legal, geographic, and socio-cultural barriers”. Until then, it may be useful to create a database enabling interested persons to gain information about the project, the interviewees as well as the place and time of the interviews. Next to raising curiosity and awareness, such a database would also acquaint potential future users with the basic features of the interviews, the semantic particularities of the collection and the suggested categories of archiving. Furthermore, it is unclear if the interviewees are aware of where their stories are stored and what will happen with the collection in *Yad Vashem* beyond being conserved. We wonder if these materials will be or indeed should be managed by the museum at all.

²⁹ For more, see: <http://www.20szadhangja.hu/rescape>

IV. 6. Collection *'Inside the Glass House and Beyond'*

As the title suggests, this collection is interested in the activities of the Zionist Youth Movement operated in the Glass House in Budapest's Vadász Street³⁰ as well as in the life stories of young women participating in the movement. It was the project's primary goal to locate women who have rescued others or have been rescued themselves and collect their stories, their involvement and role in the resistance and rescue movements in Hungary.

By focussing on women, the collection provides new and legitimate interpretations of what it means to be 'oppressed', to 'resist' or to be a 'hero'. With this gesture, head of research Katalin Pécsi-Pollner suggests a different view of the memory of the Holocaust. She aims to explore the dialectics of remembering and forgetting from the perspective of the invisible or under-represented Woman. Pécsi-Pollner reminds us that it is a question of power who remembers and what is being remembered. She raises questions in line with the fundamental questions of women's historiography: 'Why are women missing from history?' 'What circumstances did women live in in the past?' 'How did different gender roles shape their lives?' 'How can the masculine cultural understanding inherent in scientific work and thinking be modified, transformed or completed?'

Pécsi-Pollner's research is the first to give a voice to Hungarian Zionist women: it reveals new historical facts and aspects. The collection became the archive of Untold Stories of Women, recounting memories filled with little details, emotions and with a sense of humour. The collection was borne out of an international cooperation between the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Budapest and two partner-institutions in Berlin: The German Resistance Memorial Centre (*Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand*) and the International Auschwitz Committee. In August and September 2010, Pécsi-Pollner and her team (one cameraman and two volunteer assistants) recorded 53 video-interviews throughout Israel, from the Lebanese border to the Gaza strip. The copyrights are held by the Memorial Centre, where the collection can be researched upon submission of a researcher's statement. Eighteen out of the 53 interviews have so far been transcribed. The website provides access to the entire list of interviewees with an indicator next to each name if the document can be accessed in the institution.³¹ Due to financial issues, only eight interviewee profiles (photograph, short biography, date and place of the interview) have been completed until now.

In each interview, the first questions focus on family background, childhood experiences and education, then the interviewee explains how she got involved in the Zionist Movement, followed by information on the German occupation and the times after the liberation, including Aliyah. The final question of each interview asks: 'What would you do differently in your life if you had the chance to begin again?' These portraits – condensed into less than an hour – preserve the voice of the woman, her personality, feelings, emotions and her environment. However, the conspicuous presence of the interviewer in the films means that they may be more appropriately considered double portraits.

30 The Glass House on Vadász Street 29 was the property of the Weiss family and had been the building of the family's glass factory until the anti-Jewish decrees banned the family from exercising its profession. Carl Lutz, the Swiss vice-Consul in Budapest and Emigration Department for Representing Foreign Interest of the Swiss Embassy moved into the empty building in July 24, 1944. The house became a shelter as well as the center for issuing *Schutzpasses* and distributing other documents.

31 Holocaust Documentation Center, accessed July 12, 2013, www.hdke.hu/emlekezes/életinterjúk.

IV. 7. Visual History Archive in Hungary and the Collection of the Zachor Foundation

The Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive in Hungary can be accessed at the library of the Central European University, and since November 2013 also at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.³² There are 3,600 interviews that were conducted with individuals born in Hungary, 1,336 which were held in Hungarian. The majority of the interviews in Hungarian were conducted with Jewish survivors, but also include some with political prisoners, Jehovah's Witnesses and rescuers/aid providers. Unfortunately, only two Roma people from Hungary were included in the interview project.

It is our impression that both the database and its operation are full of contradictions. Although it is the world's largest collection of Holocaust testimonies, only a few people in Hungary have heard of it and even fewer actually use it. It is available to the public and free of charge, but the Hungarian institutions struggle to come up for the operational and license fees they are obliged to cover.

The Zachor Foundation for Social Remembrance developed out of the Visual History Archive. It is a non-profit educational organisation whose mission it is to raise awareness against racism, antisemitism and prejudice. The organisation develops educational programmes and approaches schools with those materials in order to demonstrate the decay of morality in the Hungarian society as well as the ways in which every-day humiliations led to genocide at hand of these interviews. To put it differently, the foundation regards the Holocaust as a 'showroom of history' where the students can cultivate human rights or tolerance towards each other. The staff is mainly high school teachers of history and foreign languages teachers, their director is Andrea Szőnyi, the head of the Hungarian Office of the *Shoah Foundation*. They believe in the power of personal memories and consider the use of testimonies more effective than that of 'alienating databases'. They also consider remembering and storytelling inherent aspects of working through of a trauma on a collective level. Interviews, recollections, memoirs, photographs and other private documents are archived and made accessible on this website.³³ The materials can be used in both formal and informal curricula. The website contains various support materials for teachers that in some cases can be used as is.

According to the staff, the collection is fully accessible online. Upon browsing through the impressive arrangement, it becomes obvious that the interview collection comprises only eleven interviews and a study on Czechoslovak repatriations as well as a few related, short autobiographical accounts. This number of interview proves to suffice in order to meet the goals of the organisation: the materials are well managed, there are photographs attached, questions are formulated so as to support a better understanding of the text, which is put into its historical and socio-psychological context.

However, it is obvious that some parts of the website are carefully and professionally edited. This hampers smooth orientation on the site, although the mistakes are irrelevant and can easily be fixed. More attention needs to be paid to the 'accessories', especially to the animations, which are either not accessible or hardly enjoyable, depriving younger generations from the visual experience. Next to some inconsis-

³² USC Shoah Foundation Institute's Visual History Archive, Central European University Library, <http://www.library.ceu.hu/vha.html>, accessed July 12, 2013.

³³ www.emlekezem.hu/irember.hu, last accessed July 12, 2013.

encies in content, little information is provided about the circumstances of the interviews, which take the form of edited monologues of varying length. Five of the eleven testimonies have already been published in a book, while one has been moved to a different website by its author, Imre Rábai. A six-chapter 'encyclopaedia' and a glossary are provided on the political history of the 20th century. Disregarding the editing issues, the site fulfils its mission and provides essential and useful materials for teachers and students.

IV. 8. Collection of the Roma Press Centre

The Roma Press Centre is a non-profit news agency that shared and delivered news stories related to Roma communities in Hungary and in the Central-Eastern European region between 1995 and 2012. This section also covers two collections managed by the centre.

The centre's most important treasure is the collection of interviews conducted in 1971 under the supervision of István Kemény. This collection covers (or scratches the surface of) the memory of the persecutions that took place during the first half of the 20th century. It was donated by Gábor Havas³⁴. The material is indexed by keywords. Visits to the archive are possible after prior consultation. Unfortunately, this incomparable gem has remained hidden from the public eye since it has not been managed properly, or indeed digitised, professionally archived or made widely accessible.

The second aspect worth mentioning in relation to the centre is that it published the first books that gave a voice to Roma survivors. The series (four editions were published in total) was titled *Porrajmos*³⁵ and published in English, Hungarian and Lovari. The majority of the approximately thirty interviews that were recorded with survivors (the Voice of the Survivors collection) are published in the book and their transcriptions as well as the audio material are stored on the organization's internal server. On the centre's website exploring the Roma Genocide, the visitor can listen to eight of the interviews and look at a map that constitutes the most complete topographical depiction of the event, representing all the 600 sites of deportation.

IV. 9. Collection of Katalin Katz

Katalin Katz's work *Restrained Memory* also aspires to fill a knowledge gap. As she argues, "the story of the *Porrajmos* of Roma in Hungary has not been told yet" and "the story demands to be noted by history [...], this is the last opportunity [...] to find survivors who can recount their experiences".³⁶ Katz considered it a personal responsibility to conduct a comprehensive research on the Roma Genocide. She im-

34 Sociologist, retired researcher at the Institute for Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Participated in the Roma surveys led by István Kemény.

35 Gábor Bernáth (ed.), *Porrajmos: e Roma seron, kon perdal zhuvinde/ Roma Holocaust túlélők emlékeznek/ Recollections of Roma Holocaust survivors* Budapest 2000: When the book was published, it triggered a debate on the meaning of the term *Porrajmos*. According to the National Roma Information and Cultural Centre (NRICC), the words means 'open up' in a sexual manner and they demonstrated against its official use, while the Roma Press Center understood *Porrajmos* as 'devouring' and questioned the belated response of the NRICC as well as its role as a self-appointed 'proofreader'. The staff of the Roma Press Centre eventually decided not to use the term until the debate was concluded. Later editions were published under the title *Roma Holocaust*. The debate is not over. Ágnes Daróczi and János Bársony enriched the possibilities with another word, when they claimed that the Roma Genocide in Romani is *Pharrajimos*, meaning 'fragmentation', 'destruction'.

36 Katz Katalin, *Visszafojtott emlékezet. A magyarországi romák holokauszt történetéhez* [Restrained Memory. Addenda to the Holocaust History of Roma in Hungary]. Budapest 2005), 8-13.

migrated to Israel in 1975 and began her research at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She visited Hungary in order to meet Roma survivors on nine occasions between 1996 and 2001.

It is unclear with whom and where she started the fieldwork, which would take between two and six weeks. However, the introductory chapter notes that the body of the book consists of 57 interviews, 40 of which were conducted with the narrative life history method (34 survivors, six from the second generation), while the rest (thirteen survivors, four from the second generation) were oral history interviews recorded by Danica Vincze and Ágnes Daróczy. Another 25 interviews were collected from articles, reports and from the news. The interview data (interviewee name, interview location and date, occasionally bibliographical information) is compiled into a list at the end of the book. The collection further includes a manuscript that explores the life of one Hungarian-Roma family from the 1950s to the present. Unfortunately, the storage of the interviews is not solved uniformly. This puts them at risk, not due to the heterogeneity of the storage itself, but due to the fact that the various data carriers have different life periods and some of the data might already be lost. As Katz explains, she has doubts whether the interviews that were recorded on magnetic tape still exist and if so, can be used at all. Although the majority of the interviews were transcribed, only 21 of them have been digitized, including their manuscripts. The collection is Katz's property. She informed us that she only provides access to those of whom she is convinced that they will „use the materials in serious and ethically unquestionable research that represents the interests of Roma”.

We wonder how many of the documents have already been lost and how many have been available for research. We are interested in the rationale for the researcher's choices to sacrifice years in order to establish a collection but then not assure its appropriate storage or accessibility.

IV. 10. Collection of Ágota Varga

Ágota Varga, director of the award winning films *Porrajmos – Gypsy Holocaust* (2000) and *Black List – Gypsy Forced Labourers in 1944* (2002), preserved over seventy hours of video and close to fifty hours of audio interviews with Roma victims of the Holocaust.

The production of the documentary film *Porrajmos* was sponsored by a programme of the Swiss government in 1998, which was initiated in order to search for and provide financial relief to Roma Holocaust survivors. The local Red Cross organisations helped to identify survivors of the Roma Holocaust. They were joined by Ágota Varga, who collected interviews with survivors throughout Hungary between 1999 and 2002. She used the interviews in both of her above-mentioned films. A copy of her interview collection was donated to the European Roma Cultural Foundation in 2013 and it is yet to be archived.

V. Closing Remarks

It must be acknowledged that the existing collections do not constitute an inherent part of the Hungarian national historical heritage and have not been incorporated into the canon of the history of the 20th century.³⁷ A number of opportunities

³⁷ Eleonore Lappin-Eppel, *Ungarisch-Jüdische Zwangsarbeiter und Zwangsarbeiterinnen in Österreich 1944/45. Arbeitseinsatz – Todesmärsche – Folgen*. Berlin 2010.

for interested and/or personally involved intellectuals to explore past experiences and present the results to the public have gone unheeded during the past two decades (most of which admittedly were based on foreign financial and institutional support). The Hungarian materials as well as other sub-collections of international researches can either not be accessed or have failed to receive enough attention as a result of their ambiguous or restricted copyright status. In some cases, the research director appropriated the documents or initiated their preservation and storage belatedly. If more time and spirit had been invested and advantage taken of the impetus and enthusiasm during the regime change period, different results could have been yielded. However, not everything has been lost: after all, documents have been produced, even if they are separate and fail to reflect upon each other.

In the beginning of our text, we addressed the question why this level of 'ignorance' on the Holocaust has been maintained even after the transition in Hungary, in contrast to the practice in other (not only Western) European countries. One possible answer to this question is the status of Holocaust research in Hungary, which is driven and torn by the needs, constraints and regulations of everyday politics as well as being deeply influenced by the overriding current relevance of the communist experience in the Eastern parts of Europe on various cultural, social and political levels. However, interviews have been conducted with survivors, having been effected and recorded for research purposes; unfortunately, once the research had been completed, there was neither a commitment nor a stable institutional setting to collect and preserve these sources. Several, retrospectively systematic coincidences have resulted in the potential loss of interviews conducted.

One important lesson that we have learned from our exploratory research is that the collections, albeit scattered and momentarily hardly researchable, still comprise a very wide-ranging testimonial heritage of the Holocaust in Hungary. Not least for that very reason, this heritage is irreplaceable. Thus, researchers exploring the oral history sources of the Holocaust as well as its collective memory face a challenging task: to make this heterogeneous material generally accessible and introduce it not only into the historiography but, in a wider sense, into everyday social practice: Even though belatedly, the voice of the survivors shall finally be heard in Hungarian history writing.

Quotation: Éva Kovács, András Lénárt, Anna Lujza Szász: Oral History Collections on the Holocaust in Hungary, in: S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods, Documentation, 15. Oktober 2014

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